



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Michele Golden/Golden & Co.  
281-759-2404 w/ 713-252-6464 c**

## **Heart Gallery Texas Black-Tie Fundraiser Celebrates End of Spectacular Year for Foster Adoptions in Central Texas**

### ***“Celebrating Success – Hearts Finding Homes” Tells How Heart Gallery Contributes to Adoptions of Foster Children***

(Austin, TX. – March 16, 2007) – The Heart Gallery of Central Texas, which has contributed to a tremendous number of foster adoptions in Central Texas, will end an amazing year of success for its annual portrait exhibit with a Texas Black-Tie Fundraiser to be held Friday, March 30, 2007, from 7-11 pm at 301 Congress in the Main Atrium. The fundraiser event titled “Celebrating Success – Hearts Finding Homes” celebrates the fact that 55% of the foster children in the portraits over the last two years, many harder to adopt children which are siblings and older children, have now been adopted and found their forever family. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is an annual project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas (ACT). The fundraiser evening event is made possible by Classic Jaguar, the title sponsor; and will be hosted by the Adoption Coalition of Texas and the Austin Junior Forum (AJF), with Honorary Co-Chairs Senator Odgen and Senator Zaffirini.

Now in its second year, the Heart Gallery portrait exhibit has seen a 55% adoption rate of the 150 plus children featured in the portraits. The exhibit usually kicks off in September every year and travels around Central Texas for eight months. “With this being the second year of the exhibit and with such a wonderful adoption rate for these foster kids, we wanted to find a way to celebrate the overwhelming success of this project and the fact that the children in the portraits have been adopted, finding their permanent and forever family. This is just tremendous, and we hope to keep the Heart Gallery going every year until all these foster children are adopted,” said Dr. Tracy Eilers, Executive Director for the Adoption Coalition of Texas and Chair for The Heart Gallery of Central Texas.

-more-

Heart Gallery of Central Texas  
Texas Black-Tie Fundraiser/Page 2

The event brings state level recognition and support to a critical effort – finding forever families for children languishing in the foster care system. The fundraiser also kicks off Child Abuse Prevention Month during April, as the Heart Galleries in Texas are being recognized by many of Texas' political legislators who will also be in attendance at the fundraiser. Erin Ferris, Austin Junior Forum Provisional Class Chair, brought AJF onboard to organize the fundraiser and obtain support from legislative members for the cause. Ferris stated, "I saw a 20/20 special on the Heart Gallery, and the children touched me. The fact that so many people banded together to make such a huge difference struck me, and as a member of the Austin Junior Forum 2006 Provisional Class, I lead the efforts to organize a fundraiser to help fund this special cause. Through my state government background, we have been able to use legislative session to bring these special children to the forefront and use community activism to raise awareness about this critical issue."

Tickets to the Texas Black-Tie event are \$75 and can be purchased through the Heart Gallery website at [www.heartgallerytexas.com](http://www.heartgallerytexas.com) or by calling 512-301-2825. All proceeds benefit the Heart Gallery of Central Texas. An additional fundraising incentive will be provided by the Ralph and Eileen Swett Foundation, who will match all donations dollar-for-dollar, up to \$50,000. Wine and hors d'oeuvres will be served at the event, as well as live music and announcements by the Senators and others connected with the Heart Gallery. A few of the foster children featured in the portraits and families that have adopted children will also be in attendance. The new song "*My Forever Family*", which was written by local songwriters Ande Rasmussen and Tommy Byrd, will also be played during the evening. The song was written and donated last week to the Adoption Coalition of Texas to use in all of its promotion and marketing, to help tell the "story" of how children in foster care feel as they wait and hope to find their forever family.

The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is an annual project of ACT, and serves as both a traveling portrait exhibit and innovative approach to community outreach which provides a unique opportunity for individuals to see children in the foster care system waiting for adoption and provides awareness for the adoption process. The exhibit is made possible by over 50 Central Texas documentary and portrait photographers who volunteer their time and talents every year to capture the characteristics and individual personalities of more than 150 children (in 95 portraits) waiting for adoption, in hopes that their work will inspire people to open their hearts and consider adoption.

-more-

The Adoption Coalition of Texas focuses on community awareness and education about kids in foster care, recruitment of potential families and systemic change with the goal of ultimately increasing the number of kids who get adopted. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is one of its several recruitment projects. The Adoption Coalition of Texas operates as a special 501c3 project of the Austin Community Foundation and is a partnership of other nonprofit agencies and Child Protective Services - all working together to find forever families for older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs, often referred to as forgotten children. These children are living in foster care, many for extended periods, and are waiting for a permanent family – a life of stability and love. At any given moment, there are 500 children waiting for adoption in the Central Texas foster care system, all removed from their natural family due to abuse or neglect.

The Austin Junior Forum (AJF) is a 501c(3) non-profit volunteer organization supporting women, children and the elderly in the Austin area through community service and fund raising. The AJF helped plan and arrange the fundraising event.

In Central Texas alone, there is a daily average of 3,500 children in foster care with 500 waiting for adoption. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years. Each year, approximately 20,000 children in foster care will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family according to the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children; Interim Estimates for FY 2003*.

If you would like more information on the Adoption Coalition of Texas, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas, or to find out ways to help, visit [www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org](http://www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org), [www.heartgallerytexas.com](http://www.heartgallerytexas.com) , or call Dr. Tracy Eilers at 512-301-2825.

# # #